DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 932 SO 011 590

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TITLE The New Social History in the High School Classroom.
PUB DATE 30 Mar 79
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Historical Association (Ft. Worth, Texas, March 30, 1979) ; Best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Involvement; *Community Resources; Community Role; Community Study; Educational Needs; Educational Resources; Effective Teaching; Experiential Learning; *Field Experience Programs; *Inservice Programs; Local History; Local Issues; *Relevance (Education); *School Community Programs; Secondary Education; Social Studies; Student Needs

ABSTRACT

Interesting and stimulating instruction in high school social studies may be achieved by using the community and its institutions as a laboratory for learning and by creating an on-going community resource inservice program. Effective ways to incorporate community resources in the curriculum include creating special sections on developing writing skills in high school students by using community topics as subject matter, developing field-based experience packages for teachers and students, and developing curriculum materials and visual aids for classroom use. Possible activities include collecting oral histories, community mapping, charting urban growth, measuring community social mobility, using community archives, and researching local history. Such activities would enable students to meet the objectives formulated by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for social studies as they (1) evidence interest in their communities; (2) obtain information from other people, libraries, maps, and pictures; and (3) understand some of the services and institutions in their communities. (KC)

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THE NEW SOCIAL HISTORY IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

A Paper Presented to the

Southwestern Historical Association

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March 30, 1979
Ft. Worth, Texas

SO 011 590

The New Social History in the High School Classroom

Within the context of my academic position, I have the opportunity to enter high school social studies classrooms on a regular basis. My visits take place in a multitude of environments, ranging from a school district that, on a per capita tax basis is the fourth poorest in the state, to a district that is among the top ten in wealth. While there are many commonalities among these disparate districts, the one that distubs me the most is the absence of effective usage of interesting and stimulating modes of instruction in social studies classrooms.

While this problem is reflected throughout the secondary school curriculum it is most critical in the areas of social studies, history and American studies, for these fields, in light of recent developments in scholarship refereed to as "the New Social History", can make active use of both affective and skill methodologies to help students develop a more sophisticated approach to the past.

One means of incorporating the results of the New Social History scholarship within secondary social studies classrooms could be a community resource field-based education program. This type of program would provide a unique opportunity to design concrete experiences for students within the important context of the real world. It could impart a sense of realism to an investigation of the social history of a group within the context of the life of that group. Concrete experiences which involve the activities of human beings not only often relate to something within the student's own experience but help to sharpen perceptions of human interactions. The reality of this environment can be a powerful force in motivating the student beyond an awareness level to a responsive mode and perhaps extend the depth of the inquiry process. Investigations of human institutions and interactions can also present to students the

opportunity of exploring workable solutions to real life problems.

Using the community and its institutions as a laboratory for learning is, in no small measure, a response of just this concern. The reading of gazetteers, maps, inventories, reports, personal accounts, graphs, town records, and other such sources, for example, can provide both quantitative and qualitative data in immediate terms, and therefore, have a greater affect on a students' development.

There is little assurance that merely being "in the field" will provoke the kinds of learning which give meaning to the network of observations and relationships that would present themselves in this type of program. Without a structure, plan, design or strategy, little attention may be given to the development of the thinking processes, so necessary to the generation of valid solutions. It is the strategy, or method employed, which affects what is transferred through the involvement of selected thinking operations. For example: a careful balance between field-site observation to observe, gather, and order data about a problem and the strategic use of supporting source material can effectively develop cognitive skills of categorizing, inferencing and generalizing.

The classroom teacher appears to offer the most effective means in relating this type of material to students since the teacher is present in class, is available in numbers sufficient to explore the community resources on the individualized basis necessary for their understanding, and may be as, or more knowledgeable, about local history as a staff member or educator of a particular community institution. Further, the teacher would be able to deal with the problem of the study of a particular event or artifact within the context of the classroom and as part of the regularly developed course. This is particularly important given the problem of scheduling trips outside the classrom on a regular

basis in the face of teaching and class schedules found in most secondary schools, a schedule which markedly limits the flexibility of the teacher in terms of going outside the school room.

There are, however, far greater problems facing the teacher than those of scheduling. Most teachers have not had courses, or, indeed, any opportunity to become aware of the value of community resources and field-based experiences as teaching tools. College-level history and pre-service teacher education courses usually ignore these areas. As a result, many teachers tend to avoid using available community resources. While there are some programs that are now encouraging the study of local community for use in secondary schools, most notably at the Newberry Library in Chicago, these types of programs are few in number. One way to deal with this problem on a broad basis would be the establishiment of on-going community resource inservice programs for secondary social studies teachers at the local level.

A program of this type could develop those community resources that might be used most effectively be secondary school teachers of history, social studies and American Studies. Included would be an examination of the ways to make effective use of all community resources in the curriculum, special sections on developing writing skills for secondary students so that they may put these resources to effective use, the explanation and development of field-based experience packages for teachers and students, the preparation of field-based components for the teacher's own courses, and the development and preparation of curriculum materials for classroom use in these areas.

Given the decline in writing abilities, as evidenced by the recent

National Educational Assessment Results in which "the success level in writing tasks, from 9 and 13 year olds declines as more specific and scholarly information is required" (National Educational Assessment in Writing, 1977), an emphasis in this area would prove helpful to teachers and eventually to their students.

Most teachers--even English teachers--have had no formal training in the teaching of composition. Indeed, as Donald H. Graves points out in a recent report to the Ford Foundation, "Even for teachers who want to get help, adequate courses in the teaching of writing are simply not available. A recent survey of education courses in 36 universities shows that 169 courses were offered in reading, 30 in children's literature, 21 in language arts, and only 2 in the teaching of writing." A writing segment would address this neglect by offering participating teachers the theoretical and practical background that will help them be more effective writing teachers. Using community resource topics as the subject matter, specific areas of composition such as writing process (prewriting, writing, and editing); the communication triangle and writing (the relationship among writer, audience, and subject); development of writing skills in high school students might be addressed.

The employment of strategy, or methods that need to be used in developing field-based skills would also be a strong emphasis of this type of program. By providing teachers with a series of these devices and showing them how to incorporate them into their classroom, the eight processes that Williams (1975) identified as ways that community resources vitalize teaching and learning could be enfused in their curriculum. These are not instructional devices, but, rather, products of the marriage of community and classroom. All of them deal with content, skill and affective outcomes and they include:

1. The encouragement of learning by inquiry and discovery
2. A bridging between the work of school and the work of the outside world
3. Strengthening motivation for learning
4. Providing opportunities to learn in the outside world
5. Extending the source of learning experiences
6. Providing change and variety
7. Improving the effectiveness of other instructional materials
8. Building respect for people and for excellent whereas they see found.

The range of topics, and methodology, for such a community resource program that encompasses content and skill development is potentially as diverse and broad as the community itself. Examples of areas that might be covered include:

1. Curriculum Planning and Community Resources - analysis of history, social studies, and American studies classes and consideration of the most effective areas for the use of community resources.
2. Community Resources as Educational Tools - a survey of different techniques used in developing community resources as educational tools with emphasis on historical analysis including an emphasis on oral history and participation observer research techniques.
3. Development of geographic skills in using community resources - including use of community mapping, charting urban growth and integration of these skills into historical content.
4. Methodological Considerations - use and preparation of case studies, inquiry techniques, and simulations in community studies.
5. Measuring Community Social Mobility - using city directories, tax lists, and voting records.
6. Using Community Archives - including retrieval and preparation of archival exhibits.
7. Using Popular American Writing in the Classroom - using local newspapers, comic books and strips, and novels with a discussion and evaluation of their characteristics, with special attention upon the formulaic structure of the novel.

8. Using Local Heroes in History - including an evaluation of assumptions, use and collection of evidence to validate and analyze ideas.

9. American Studies and the Writing Process - focusing on the American Hero including a discussion of sources like Daniel Boorstin's book The Image and popular culture phenomena to distinguish between the hero and the celebrity in which a construction of a classroom situation to examine the three stages of the writing process might be experienced:

    1. Discussion of hero vs. celebrity (pre-writing)
    2. Writing about this discussion (writing)
    3. Evaluating each other's writing and revising (re-writing)

10. Preparation and Use of Visual Aids for the Classroom - such as slides and films, including a consideration of the use of audio-visual aids in pre and post community visit discussion, and an analysis of the use of historic films.

11. Using the School as a Community Resource

The interdisciplinary nature of the approach outlined above is one that might be used in any area of the country, and one that could be supported by any size school district. Depending on the local situation programs established in various areas of the country could use this general format, but might develop specific topics appropriate to the region being served.

Several major objectives of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for social studies emphasize that by ages 9 children should:

1. Evidence interest in their communities.

2. Consider more than one source for information they need by obtaining information from other people, libraries, maps, and pictures.

3. Understand some of the services and institutions within their communities. (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1970).

Unfortunately, many adolescents can not meet these objectives as they

have a limited range of their community and have not been taught anything about it.

Involving both teachers and students with the community and its resources is a mechanism for attacking this problem. It might provide students a beginning understanding of their environment and, conversely, give citizens participating in the program an insight into the educative process by actively including them in it.

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